

# **THE NEUROTIC CHRISTIAN: IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN MINISTRY IN NIGERIA**

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## **Introduction**

Neurosis was the term first used to classify psychological disorders in which anxiety is the underlying problem but the person is still in touch with reality. On the basis of his experiences with patients, Freud postulated that emotional disorders, which he called neuroses, arise from an interaction between two categories of experiences: predisposing and precipitating experiences (Gray, 2002). For Freud predisposing experiences typically occur in the first 5 to 6 years of life and relate to infantile sexual wishes and conflicts; and precipitating experiences occur later and most immediately bring on the emotional breakdown. Precipitating experiences activate repressed memories and wishes that are connected with one or more predisposing experiences, stirring up the repressed material so that it threatens to enter consciousness. To defend against those memories and wishes, the mind responds in ways that lead to psychological disorder. Thus, neuroses, though obsolete psychodynamic term, is used to describe psychological disorder thought to result from unconscious conflicts and the anxiety they cause (Barlow and Durand, 2005).

In a nation where individuals are torn-in-between emotional breakdown, the presence of neurotic symptoms is a societal-recognized problem. Neurotic symptoms interfere with production in the work force, affect interpersonal relationship, contribute to political instability and produce great unhappiness in individuals and families. However, in this study, neurotic symptoms are taken to mean behaviours, or introspective reports of emotion-states, which interfere with individual's optimal performance and adjustment to the environment. The disruptive influence may be more or less severe, but neurotic symptoms by definition do not interfere with behaviour to the extent that the individual is totally unable to cope with environmental demands.

Some societal institutions are most concerned with neurotic symptoms when they actually disrupt social functions. While paying some lip-service to the pursuit of individual's happiness and adjustment, the society generally leaves the responsibility for treatment of non-disruptive symptoms with the suffering individual or his family. If this stance were true of the society, what is the position of the Church? Expectedly, the Church must assume a different position. The Church amongst other things focuses on the individual: his salvation, his happiness, his wellbeing and his relations with his neighbour as well as with God. More so, the Church's emphasis on collective unity again requires optimal health and adjustment for each of the members of the body. So the presence of neurotic symptom among her members must be a cause for great concern and great implication for Christian ministry.

This Study, therefore, addresses these questions: Why are there neurotic Christians? Does being raised in a Christian family contribute to development of neurosis? And, how can neurotic Christians be helped. While aetiology for neurotic symptoms may vary, this study will focus on two areas of causality: guilt and stress.

## **Guilt**

Guilt as a causal agent in neurosis arises specifically from the evaluative function in individual. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, New 8th Edition defined guilt as unhappy feelings caused by knowing or thinking that you have done something wrong. Some Christians live with these unhappy feelings or unfounded or false feelings of guilt. This brings conflict to their lives along with following tendencies: feelings of inferiority, perfectionism, constant self-blame, fear of failure (with the consequent hypervigilant) state; and being too demanding of others (Melgosa, 2009).

Viewed this way, it appears as if feelings of guilt cannot offer any positive dividend. It has to be underscored that a feeling of guilt is a useful resource that can encourage considerate and positive behaviours thereby fosters and favours healthy interactions. Exploiting its positive value, a real sense of guilt is a symptom of an awakened conscience which works as self-censorship and prevents immoralities and crimes (Melgosa, 2009). We note with caution that not all consciences are healthy. Consciences do not always provide a wise standard of conduct. While some consciences are too narrow, others are too wide, while some are too thick, others are too thin. Those with a strict conscience expect similar standards in others. And those with more lenient ones often see everything as being good. It then becomes necessary to compare one's conscience with external and transcendent standards; with ethical principles of transcendent validity. Of course, in the light of this study there is no other better external and transcendent validity other than the Holy Scriptures. This is why Apostle Paul warned Timothy his disciple of some people, "whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron" who would command others to do absurd things (1 Timothy 4: 2, 3). These seared consciences are insensitive. They become useless due to repeated transgressions and cannot be trusted as a valid guide for conduct.

As Lewis (1971) observed, a relationship between superego-induced guilt and neurotic symptoms was hypothesized by Freud in 1923. Others are in affirmation with the hypothesis that unresolved guilt produces neurotic complaints, from psychosomatic upsets to obsessive-compulsive disorders (Tournier, 1965). Classic literature proffers such excellent examples as Lady Macbeth. Freud's postulated relationship between unresolved guilt and neurotic symptoms centres on the individual's self-concept, lowering it drastically. Thus, with such a poor opinion of the self, "the patient must not be healthy, he must remain ill, for he deserves no better" (Freud, 1938).

For Ausubel (1959) guilt may be seen as a special kind of negative self-evaluation which occurs when an individual acknowledges that his behaviour is at variance with a given moral value to which he feels obligated to conform. As an individual grows and develops, moral values and principles are internalized: they are learned and remembered. The child is taught moral precepts by command and example, through training and through modelling. This process proceeds rapidly, and is relatively complete at an early age. The child acquires a conscience, or an active superego, or a readily-accessible set of moral values.

Sadly enough, the development of matching behaviour does not keep pace with the internalized moral values, and for most people, it lags behind throughout life. Apostle Paul has not been alone in his admission that "good that I would, I do not..." When behaviour does not conform to moral standards, and as the individual becomes aware of this, the resultant effect is guilt (Ausubel, 1955). And unresolved guilt induces anxiety and stress, which may then be revealed in

neurotic symptoms. The presence of neurotic symptoms in the general population is therefore, not surprising. More problematic is the high incidence of neurotic symptoms among adherents to the Christian faith, which, as Freud (1930) pointed out, claims to save mankind from a sense of guilt.

There are a number of potential explanations for this phenomenon. Young (1981) suggested two. First, it may be postulated that guilt is not the precursor to the development of neurotic symptoms among Christians. That is, stress may induce these symptoms of neurosis. If this were true, it would not be expected that Christians should be symptom-free even if they were guilt-free. Such a postulate negates the earlier, still unproven, hypothesis that unresolved guilt underlies the bulk of neurotic symptomatology, even among Christians. Many practitioners among them, including Paul Tournier (1962), have found strong evidence to support the direct-relationship hypothesis. Its summary dismissal, without convincing contradictory evidence, seems unwarranted at this time. It must be remembered, however, that causes other than unresolved guilt may lie behind neurosis, and these causes may be found among members of the Church.

A second potential explanation is that Christian faith, in fact, does not save mankind from a sense of guilt. If this were true, we would not expect Christians to be any more symptom-free than the general population, simply on the basis of their being Christians. This is a most challenging postulation, one that is contradicted by many writers who have claimed freedom from guilt through Christian faith: Apostle Paul, Martin Luther, John Wesley and many others. The postulate remains, however, that some Christians may be neurotic because their faith has not saved them from a sense of guilt. Many neurotic Christians exist because their sense of guilt has not been relieved. It should not be assumed in that case that the sense of guilt cannot or will not be relieved; it is stated that it simply has not. That guilt can be and is relieved by Christian faith is attested to not only by personal testimony, as alluded to earlier but also by empirical investigation.

### **Empirical Investigation**

Barton and Vaughan (1976) conducted a longitudinal study relating Church membership and personality as assessed by Cattell's 16PF questionnaire. They found that the Church member group scored significantly higher on guilt proneness than non-member control group at the first of study. This finding supports the hypothesis that individuals espousing Christian faith are not thereby free of guilt. Further, Cattell's guilt proneness has a salient loading on the second-order questionnaire factor, anxiety, which, as has been seen, is an important variable in neurosis.

In a five-year follow up, however, Barton and Vaughan (1976) found that the Church-member group had fallen dramatically on guilt proneness, and were now statistically equivalent to the non-member group. Similarly, as would be expected given the factor loadings, the Church-member group fell below the non-member group on the second order anxiety factor. Barton and Vaughan (1976) concluded by suggesting that although the Church may attract active members who originally tend to be anxious and guilt-prone, the effects of membership are to allow a decrease in both these factors and hence generally a more peaceable state of mind.

To suggest that Christian faith was effective in lowering guilt proneness and anxiety would support the hypothesis that Christian faith can and does relieve a sense of guilt, but the alternative hypothesis that simply membership in a cohesive, supportive organization produced the personality change is an equally valid explanation of the Barton and Vaughan findings. While further investigation and correlational research is necessary to differentially verify these alternative hypotheses, it is sufficient for the moment to take Barton and Vaughan's findings as supportive of the hypothesis that Christian faith can and does decrease a sense of guilt. Whether the effect is due directly to the act of faith or indirectly through concomitant Church affiliation is an open question.

### **Why are there Guilty and Neurotic Christians?**

If Christian faith can reduce a sense of guilt or guilt proneness, why are there guilty and neurotic Christians? Allport (1955) suggests a few sources- the arresting forces of training producing infantile, self-serving and superstitious religious belief; religious insecurity leading to compulsive rituals of reassurance, and extremely rigid training in home or Church. Melgosa (2009) underscores that there is a close relationship between guilt and certain behaviours: growing up in strict environment, difficulty in forgiving one's own mistakes, difficulty in forgiving others, living in constant fear of breaking any rule, regulation, or principle, being alarmed at any sign of bad news, frequently afraid when one thinks of the future, feeling uncomfortable when something does not work out perfectly, bothering excessively when others are not punctual, suffering from feelings of inferiority, being easily angry with oneself and others, worrying too much about what others may think of oneself, and imagining God constantly angry at one's sins and imperfections. Young (1981) classified potential reasons into six areas:

- \*Ecclesiogenic neurosis;
- \*Inadequate understanding;
- \*Convoluting thinking;
- \*Inferiority feelings;
- \*Attraction of neurotics; and
- \*Actuarial explanation.

**Ecclesiogenic Neurosis.** The German psychiatrist Klaus Thomas (1965) coined the term ecclesiogenic neurosis to describe the induction of neurotic symptoms in individuals who are expected to live up to moral standards of the Church without having or before gaining the necessary saving faith (Harnik, 1978). The unreasonable-at a particular point in time-demands of the Church, or of a moralistic Christian family, may set the behaviour ideal so high above behaviour potential that the individual despairs of ever measuring up. "Sin abounds, and guilt abounds, and where grace does not intervene through saving faith, the result is neurosis" (Young 1981, 4).

Thomas's postulation no doubt centres on the development of neurosis in the child but it is likewise applicable to the adolescent or adult individual. Even with saving faith, an individual Christian may have ethical standards or moral values set far beyond his or her ability to equal behaviourally. The recognized disparity then produces dissatisfaction and anxiety, if not actual guilt. A conscious sense of guilt may be precluded in some individuals through cognitive acceptance of forgiveness, without concomitant anxiety reduction. Where the acceptance of forgiveness does not extend to the point of accepting the failure and moving to better efforts, the

sense of guilt is simply repressed as cognitively and logically dissonant. The repressed guilt then continues to contribute to free-floating anxiety, producing neurotic symptoms.

Examples of ecclesiogenic neurotic symptoms in adults may be found among ascetic mystics, extreme penitents, and the mediaeval flagellants (Young, 1981). It is also possible that apostle Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was a kind of psychosomatic ailment induced by feelings of anxiety over his pre-Damascus treatment of some Christians-forgiven but not forgotten, as evidenced in their resentment to him and as revealed in his later sermons.

A second, more reprehensible form of ecclesiogenic neurosis is that produced by the haranguing preacher who in an attempt to show up his or her own feelings of inadequacy or insecurity subjects his or her congregation to moral diatribes, sharing the same lot, work out their own guilt by projecting it upon the all-too-receptive congregation. Many members having the wickedness of their failings thus pointed out to them week after week, develop a sense of personal inadequacy and worthlessness which may lead to the development of neurotic symptoms. Accusations that one has behaved wrongly, has performed inadequately, or has failed miserably levelled by a respected individual such as a member of the clergy, go a long way toward contradicting realistic self-evaluation. It is thus that the Church, through her ministers can directly induce neurotic symptoms among her adherents.

### **Inadequate Understanding**

Inadequate understanding of Christian doctrines, dogmas and ethos rather than the actual demands of the Church is somehow responsible for many cases of neurosis among Christians. Many Christians following Christ's admonition, "Be ye perfect, even as also am perfect" set a standard absolute perfection against which to measure their behaviour. While such a belief set may be theologically debatable, it does not in itself produce neurotic symptoms.

### **Convoluting Thinking**

This is a more extreme form of inadequate understanding of our Christian faith, beliefs and practices. Many people in history have been convinced that matter is evil. Given that matter is evil and that God in his holiness has nothing to do with evil, they believe that together with our material body, it separates us from God. Some of these ascetics have gone extremes, believing for example that sexual relations even in marriage are intrinsically evil. Such contorted thinking pervades much of modern Christian practice, often on a subtle level. It is not therefore surprising to examine the lyrics of some contemporary gospel music to discover expressions of a desire to be "set free from this earthly prison" where "bars of bone hold my soul" (Young 1981, 5).

Distorted thinking may also produce deviant behaviour in the name of Christian faith. Where individuals establish themselves as special emissaries of God, claiming a unique revelation from Him (symptomatic of a psychotic delusional state), they may then gather neurotically subjected converts to their new sects. Using repressive techniques and paranoiac harangues, such individuals may impress their convoluted thinking onto their followers, inducing at least a massive set of *folid a duex*, and at worst a pseudo-psychotic organization.

### **Feelings of Inferiority**

Humility, one of the virtues of the Christian faith induces behaviour which is in many ways indistinguishable from that produced by feelings of inferiority. Preference for another over

oneself, recognition of one's sinful nature, perception of the distance between self and God are all aspects of humility and are all relative to inferiority feelings. Humble behaviour due to inferiority feelings is no more valuable than humble behaviour due to pride- "I can be holier than you can".

Freud (1932) observed that the sense of inferiority and the sense of guilt are difficult to distinguish. In fact, inferiority feelings are representative neurotic symptoms. Where the Church encourages humility without adequately distinguishing it from feelings of inferiority, and without emphasising the identity of the individual in Christ, it is likely to encourage neurosis among its adherents.

### **Attraction of Neurotics**

When improperly used some aspects of Christian virtues can and do contribute to induction and development of neurotic symptoms. This does not in itself account for the presence of all neurotics in the Church. Many individuals from the general public, who complain of neurotic symptoms and an unassailable sense of guilt are drawn from the Church's promise of nurturant support and forgiveness. Spellman, Baskett and Bryne (1971) found that sudden religious converts had a higher level of anxiety than a group of regular Church attendees and non-attendees combined, leading them to suggest that manifest anxiety- a neurotic symptom- was a contributing factor in religious conversion. Rappaport (1978) combined the anxiety dimension with a dogmatism scale (Rokeach, 1956) and found that individuals who switch to a different religious affiliation tended to be low on dogmatism and high on anxiety, while those who abandoned religious belief tended to be high on dogmatism and low on anxiety. The high dogmatism/high anxiety group maintained their religious beliefs. Thus both Spellman et al and Rappaport found evidence relating high anxiety to religious conversion. The Church, then, does draw neurotics, or is at least the target of their movement.

That the Church is successful in decreasing the anxiety of its adherents is attested to by the already-cited study by Barton and Vaughan (1976). At any given time, there will be highly anxious individuals in the Church who have affiliated in an attempt to cope with their neurotic symptoms.

Of course, the implicit offer of free counselling by ministerial staff of the Church, much as its leaves to be desired may be drawing card for neurotics in the general population. A sympathetic ear, as psychologists from Freud to Rogers have observed, goes a long way in helping an individual cope with free-floating anxiety. Inasmuch as neurotic individuals recognise this, they may seek the Church as a venue for cathartic experience.

### **Actuarial Prediction**

Actuarial models, such as Eysenck and Eysenck (1975) suggested that important personality factors such as extraversion and neuroticism are normally distributed in the population. Thus, in any large, relatively random sample, the Church for example, one would expect to find individuals with a high tendency to express neurotic symptoms. From this point of view, there are neurotic Christians simply because there are neurotic people.

Having looked at guilt as one of the causal agent in neurosis, let us now turn to stress.

### **Stress**

Stress can simply be defined as body's physiological response to a stressor, which is any event or change that requires adaptation. Given the present economic downturn and political and religious unrest, our society is stress-ridden. Infinitesimally small number of people escapes from stress. It has become intricately part of our daily existence. Sources of stress are not far-fetched. Time and work pressure, relationship problems, noise, pollution, finances and insecurity are some of the sources of stress.

Stress affects the physical body, the mind and emotions. It is not to be taken lightly for its consequences are very painful and may become fatal.

### **Organic Effects of Stress**

Many organic diseases originate from mental state. Work and family pressure, financial problems, uncertainty about the future and other worries cause stress, and the following diseases may follow as noted by Melgosa (2009: 112):

- \*Angina pectoris;
- \*Arteriosclerosis;
- \*Gastric ulcer;
- \*Hypertension;
- \*Irritable colon; and
- \*Myocardial infraction.

Stress can also be so-called psychosomatic reactions:

- \*Acne, hives, eczema;
- \*Backache, rheumatism;
- \*Asthma, allergy, bronchitis;
- \*Vaginismus, impotence;
- \*Obesity, hyperthyroidism;
- \*Migraine, anxiety; and
- \*Conjunctivitis.

We must also add problems related to thought, emotions, and behaviour, also caused by excessive stress. Thought processes:

- \*Difficulty to think logically;
- \*Memory failure;
- \*Lack of concentration; and
- Mistakes.

### **Emotions:**

- \*Ongoing tension;
- \*Fear of disease;
- \*Impatience and Irritability; and
- \*Inferiority feelings.

### **Behaviour:**

- \*Decrease in verbal fluency;
- \*Risk of use of noxious substances;
- \*School/work absenteeism;
- \*Sleeping difficulties; and
- \*Problems with relationships.

Be it as it may, in the right amount, stress can be a useful source of motivation that must be taken advantage of. Stress mechanisms release necessary energy to face any emergency. As a useful source of energy stress:

- \*Activates the nervous system's alert mechanism;
- \*Accelerates cardiac rhythm;
- Raises blood pressure; and
- \*Releases hormones that favour achievement.

However, Melgosa (2009) observed that if a status of intense achievement based on stress and tension is maintained, effectiveness disappears. And when stress is prolonged a bit further, serious organic and mental disorders take over.

Rightly conceded, stress-induced neurotic symptoms, including many of psychosomatic disorders, result when the perceived demands of the environmental situation exceed the individual's perceived ability to perform; this occurs, for example, when the demands of the work situation demand more time investment or decision-making capacity than the worker is willing or able to give. The perceived discrepancy is stressful, assuming that the individual wants to perform well and the resultant emotional stress or anxiety affects various organ systems. If the suffering individual is unable to dissipate this anxiety, he or she may experience a breakdown in a given organ system, resulting in a psychosomatic disorder such as duodenal ulcer. Alternatively, the individual may develop behaviours which serve to dissipate the excessive emotional energy: long walks, running, reading, hobby activities. To the extent that such activities serve to dissipate anxiety without interfering with general performance and interpersonal adjustment, they are certainly adaptive. Frequently, anxiety-reducing activities become functionally autonomous, and continue even when their stress relieving value is no longer necessary.

In some cases, the dissipation of emotional energy is so rewarding or so marginally effective that the behaviour becomes compulsive: engaged in repetitively as if for its own sake, interfering with other behaviour and adjustment. When this occurs, the behaviour is no longer adaptive, but neurotic. Typically, this is apparent where extreme investments of time are made in the symptomatic behaviour, where it dominates the individual's conversation, or is the focus of all interpersonal activities. Some people are compulsive runners or joggers, for example. The original motivating factor of concern for one's health fades in importance, and running becomes an end in itself. Other people are compulsive Church-workers. The stress of family interactions and concern over raising the family in a good Christian home in the face of perceived personal inadequacy leads some people to devote excessive amounts of time to Church work, to the detriment of the family. Since they are serving God so faithfully, they tend to project on Him the responsibility for ensuring that the family grows up right rather than doing the job themselves.

### **Implication for Christian Ministry**

#### **Ability of the Ministers to Explain and Impact the Fundamentals of Christian Beliefs and Practices**

Every priest must be able to know the provision and application of the atonement of Christ to mankind and how to explain and impact same to his congregation or parishioners:

- \*Man sins;
- \*Man is condemned because sin deserves death;

\*God's love cannot overrule His justice. Any plan of salvation must incorporate God's justice;\*Given that it was man who sinned, it must be man who pays the penalty for that sin;  
\*The payment of sin must be big enough to pay for all the sins of all mankind of all times;  
\*God became a man. He lived a holy life. He died on the cross. He rose from the dead.  
\*Given that Jesus was a man, His sacrifice was the sacrifice of a man;  
\*Because Jesus was God, His sacrifice had infinite value;  
\*By virtue of Jesus being sinless, His death had positive merit. Had Jesus committed a single act of sin, His death would have only paid for his own sin. However, His death has value. It has enough value to compensate for one's sin. Given that Jesus did not sin, His death still had value, infinite value, and enough value to compensate for all the sins of all mankind for all time.  
\*God accepted the death of Christ as an acceptable substitute for the sins of mankind; and  
\*In order to take advantage of this sacrifice, God demanded that man place his faith in Christ. This implies repenting of his sins, turning from any other religion, believing that Christ died for the world was applicable to him and submitting to the Lordship of Jesus.

**Life Application:** Here is a non-Christian say Ibrahim, living a normal life, like any other unbeliever. He lives in sin and enjoys it. However, there comes a time in his life, through any number of ways, when he is reminded of his own sinful condition and the severe consequences of dying in his sins. One must remember that as long as a person is a sinner, he is dead in trespasses and sins. However, when the Holy Spirit pricks his heart with the truth of the Gospel, he begins to feel guilty for his sins; he begins to feel miserable for all the evil things that he has done through his life; he begins to experience "godly sorrow" that can lead to repentance; he begins to want relief. This is the ministry of the Holy Spirit convicting men of sin.

If Ibrahim comes under conviction, he will likely be emotional about his repentance. Nobody will beg him to straighten out his crooked paths. He does it willingly. He will be begging others to forgive him. And certainly, if a man truly repents he will turn from his old life of sin and start up the sacred pathway of obedience. Continuing in sin is as foreign to repentance as continuing to break the law is to a pardoned criminal. In other words, repentance involves:

- (i) The mind;
- (ii) The emotions; and
- (iii) The will.

### **The Mind**

Repentance involves the intellect, the mind of man. Spiritual truth transcends the natural or human way of doing and learning things. Nevertheless, man must be convicted of truth in his mind if he will ever truly repent. Repentance is a change of mind that results in a change of behaviour. In the parable of the Prodigal Son, one of the two sons came to the Father seeking the inheritance he had. After receiving it, he went into another country and wasted it, and in just a few months he found himself feeding pigs on a Gentile farm. "But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough to spare, but I perish here with hunger!' The first step for this young man was recognising that he had a need. It was a mental step.

### **The Emotions**

Repentance involves the emotions of man. It is one thing to feel sorry and cry a little, it is quite another for this sorrow to lead to genuine repentance. Paul said, “As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting” (2 Corinthians 7: 9). It is difficult to imagine a person who has really come to grips with his sinful heart, who will not become emotionally distressed. King David, after stooping to adultery with another man’s wife, poured out his heart in Psalm 51. He writes, “The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Psalm 51: 17).

### **The Will**

Repentance also involves the will of man. It is not enough simply to realize that one has a need and even be so concerned that one comes to tears. There must be firm decision of the will if repentance is to be complete. When the prodigal son came to his senses he said, “I will arise and go to my father” (Lukle 15: 18), and later indeed did something about his condition. Repentance is never complete until the sinner has acted upon his conviction. Repentance means that a drug addict must turn away from his abuse of drugs; it means that an adulterer must turn away from adultery; it means that a liar must turn from his dishonesty; it means that a thief must turn from his stealing and repay that which he has stolen.

### **The Results of Repentance**

The Holy Spirit is very active in preparing the way for one to be saved. In addition, without “godly sorrow that leads to repentance” there may be no salvation. Without laying a good foundation of repentance, the salvation that man builds upon may prove to be weak and ineffective and thereby resulting in neurotic Christianity that produces guilt and stress. The importance of genuine repentance are:

- (i) It prepares a ground for genuine faith;
- (ii) There is rejoicing in heaven;
- (iii) It helps to erase guilt; and
- (iv) It seeks to repair whatever damage has been done in the sinful condition.

### **It Prepares Ground for Genuine Faith**

Like in our example above, the resultant effect of Ibrahim’s repentance is that it will proffer a ground for genuine faith. Genuine faith is more than intellectual acceptance of vicarious deeds of Christ on the cross. Any person whose life is not characterised by goodness and holiness does not possess genuine faith. It is not a once-for- all commitment to Christ but a continual day-by-day moment-by-moment commitment to Christ.

### **There is Rejoicing in Heaven**

Another thing that happens in repentance is that there is rejoicing in Heaven. “Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance” (Luke 15: 7).

### **It Helps to Erase Guilt**

There is something about genuine repentance that produces genuine confession. “Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3: 19). Moreso, the Scripture says, “Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed” (James 5: 16). Healing here includes that of guilt and stress. So, whenever true confession takes place, there is a

genuine release from the guilt. There is indeed, a real cleansing and resulting joy of being forgiven. This is maximally appreciable in the life of one who not only have the sensation that God has forgiven him and goes ahead to forgive himself and subsequently be released from the awful weight of guilt that he has carried. For “He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, he who confesses and forsakes them will have mercy” (Proverbs, 28: 13).

### **It Seeks to Repair Whatever Damage has Been Done in the Sinful Condition**

If there have been verbal battles and harsh words, genuine repentance will seek forgiveness for these outbursts. If there has been dishonesty through lying or stealing, genuine repentance will attempt to straighten out the lies and restore the stolen property. If there has been hypocrisy, genuine repentance will attempt to be free and open (McCain, 1996).

Neat though it is, it is not sufficient, in dealing with the Christian neurotic, to simply encourage him or her to “have faith”, to accept divine forgiveness and live a free life. Many neurotic Christians are in that state because their guilt feelings persist. Apparently, they have not been able to accept God’s forgiveness. They may cognitively believe it, but they are unable to experimentally experience it. The trained minister of the gospel will now use his counselling skills in these areas:

- (i) Beliefs and practices;
- (ii) Confession; and
- (iii) Restitution.

### **Beliefs and Practices**

Correct belief naturally leads to correct practice. Some self-acclaimed ministers have done more harm than good in this area. The trained Christian minister through systematic Bible teaching and counselling will enable the neurotic Christian derobe himself of all the junks he has picked here and there, probably from narrow-minded ministers in narrow-minded ministries who have been wrecking havoc in his life. The trained minister will enable the neurotic Christian to seek the power and infilling of the Holy Spirit without which his Christian life will continue to be a tissue of inconsistency. Of course, this will result in more emotional breakdown. The Spirit-filled Christian will live a fulfilled and victorious Christian life that is devoid of neuroticism.

### **Confession**

One successful and psychologically valid technique for the reduction of neurotic anxiety due to guilt is confession. This is an age-old practice of the Church. This is akin to Freud and Breuer’s catharsis- the talking cure. Christian confession is more closely tied to the problem than is secular psychotherapeutic usage. Christian confession is first an admission to God, then a fellow-Christian minister, a priest or a Christian counsellor of specific failure to live up to the shared Christian standards. The guilt was not over the activity per se but was due to the discrepancy between the behaviour and the shared ideal. The same behaviour that the secular therapist views as rather innocuous may be recognized by the Christian counsellor as a guilt-inducing deviation from shared values. Confession itself can be used as an avenue for neurotic, compulsive behaviours which can become a ritual in which case is no longer of therapeutic value. There are compulsive confessors, attempting to confess away their feelings of guilt. Others find comfort from their anxiety in ritualized confession, saving them from coming to grips with the source of

their anxiety (Young, 1981). This is where the counselling skills of the minister will be made manifest in order to have an efficacious result.

### **Restitution**

Restitution is psychologically valid to the extent that it enables the reconstruction of the shattered self-concept. The individual in effect says, "I was a useless person for the crime that I committed, but since I have made up for it, I must be a better person than I thought I was". The minister of the gospel can now help the individual to piece his damaged self-concept together through emphasizing his identity in Christ. When the low self-concept is contradicted by evidence of divine love and care, through the accepting, nurturing presence of the gospel minister, the chance of presenting neurotic Christianity is drastically reduced.

### **The Role of the Christian**

The onus of preventing and curing neurosis does not lie on the Christian minister all alone. It is the task of the Christian to sieve and appropriate the Gospel message. As far as unfounded or disproportionate guilt is concerned, the Christian should avoid approaches that are too strict, achieve thought control, unload oneself off the built-up tension created by guilt, practice forgiveness and seek God. God is willing to forgive even the greatest evil, including what humans are not willing to forgive. If guilt is justified, there is no other option but to rectify behaviours, obtain pardon and try to restore any damage incurred.

Overcoming stress means tackling the various dimensions of existence: spiritual, mental and physical. The Christian should endeavour to achieve peace of mind. Peace of mind is incompatible with stress. The Christian may attain a clear conscience and serene mind through faith and prayer. In the physical dimension, deep breathing, relaxation and physical exercise appear to be the best remedy to fight stress. One of the most effective forms of therapy for cases of stress is called cognitive psychotherapy. It consists of teaching individuals to govern their thoughts instead of allowing thoughts to govern them. In that respect, the Christian has to cooperate with the trained Christian minister in all the counselling units in order to achieve maximal result.

### **Conclusion**

There is no denying the fact that there are neurotic Christians. The Church cannot be entirely exonerated from the production of neurotic Christians. Excessive early moral demands in Christian families and through the work of untrained and narrow-minded ministers who truncate the Scriptures, few neurotic Christians come to rear up their ugly heads. The Church through her evangelistic campaigns and ministerial services come to attract some others who come seeking for relief. Their presence not only imposes a lot of challenges to the Church but also a cause for great concern. The Church as a healing arm of Christ can proffer freedom from guilt, deliverance from stress and from many of the underlying causes of neurotic behaviour. For the Christian, grace must always intervene through saving faith in order that sin and guilt will not dare to present neurotic symptoms in the life of the individual Christian.

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